

Swan Falls Precision Bombing Range No. 4

Location

- Swan Falls PBR No. 4 property number F10ID0134 (formerly known as Gowen Field Old Precision Bombing Range No. 3 and Gowen Field High Altitude Precision Bombing Range No. 4) is located approximately 13 miles southwest of the town of Orchard and 26 miles south of Boise in Ada County, Idaho. The PBR is located in Sections 31 and 32 of Township 2S, Range 2E, and Sections 5 and 6 of Township 3S, Range 2E.

Property History

- The Department of the Army, Gowen Army Airbase, acquired the land from the Department of Interior by Executive Order 8932, dated 5 November 1941, for high altitude bombardment training. Swan Falls PBR No. 4 was declared excess to the needs of the Gowen Field on 15 November 1946 and was relinquished to the Department of the Interior on 13 October 1947. The range was retransferred to the Department of the Interior on 1 December 1947 (USACE, 2003).
- The former Swan Falls PBR No. 4 was incorporated into the 138,051 acre Orchard Training Area (OTA) when it was established in 1953 by the Idaho Army National Guard. The OTA is used by the National Guard for armored vehicle training including firing of live ammunition, firing of lasers, tank maneuvering, bivouacking, helicopter maneuvering and small arms training. The OTA was incorporated into the Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area in 1980 by the Department of Interior under Public Land Order 5777. Military training is allowed to continue within the OTA portion of the Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area until 2015.

Historical Military Use:

- Swan Falls PBR No. 4 first fell under the command of Gowen Army Airbase, Idaho. The Army Air Corps took control of the Boise Air Terminal on 17 December 1940. Construction of the base began on 21 January 1941. Gowen Army Air Base was to become a Second Air Force base for the training of heavy bombardment units. Troops began arriving to the base in May 1941. The base became operationally active in the summer of 1941 with the arrival of bomber aircraft (USACE, 2003).
- By December 1942, Gowen Field engaged in the training of medium bombardment crews for combat and reconnaissance. Units' first training at the field included the 42nd Bombardment Group and the 16th Reconnaissance Squadron. First training in B-17 bombers, in 1943, B-24 bombers arrived for training. During this period, numerous other squadrons trained with practice bombs and flew from Gowen Army Air Base (USACE, 2003).

- Swan Falls Precision bombing Range No. 4 was used in 1943 as a simulated building area with dummy oil dumps. Missions would have used practice bombs, such as the M38A2 practice bombs. Bombs were stored in the ordnance area at Gowen Field. Bombing altitudes were varied to give experience in high, medium and low altitude bombing (USACE, 2003).
- A typical bombing run “mission” was made on an adjacent target, Bombing Target No. 1, and continued on a Swan Falls Precision Bombing Target No. 4. Bombers would enter at magnetic heading 161° for approach to Swan falls Bombing Target No. 4, and, after a bomb impact, would turn left on a heading of 71° to the adjacent Bomb Target No. 1. After bombing that target, they would turn again to heading 251° for another run to Swan Falls Bombing Target No. 4. Numerous runs would continue this pattern of bombing (USACE, 2003).
- Aerial photography from 1956 indicates that this range was also used for aircraft gunnery practice. Strafing targets are seen lined up from northeast to southwest, indicating that aircraft flew in from the southeast and shot at the targets. Ammunition used would have been small arms up to .50 caliber (USACE, 2003).
- Swan Falls PBR No. 4 was used at least until March of 1945. The land was available for surplus on 31 December 1945. The range was declared surplus to the needs of Gowen Field by letter dated 15 November 1946, placed in caretaker status during 1947 and relinquished to the Department of Interior on 13 October of that year. A final retransfer to the Department of Interior transpired on 1 December 1947 (USACE, 2003).
- The property had no government owned structures at the time of surplus. There were no permanent constructed facilities on the range. After Army air corps usage, the land remained unimproved (USACE, 2003).
- The Swan Falls PBR No. 4 was incorporated into the OTA when it was established in 1953. The Orchard Training Area has 16 designated ranges for tank and helicopter gunnery, field artillery and mortar unit firing, rifle and small arms firing, and grenade launching. There are also ten maneuver areas at the training site located around the perimeter of the firing range. The National Guard, USACE, and U.S. Marine Corps have trained at the OTA. The Idaho National Guard has indicated that the former Swan Falls PBR No. 4 portion of the OTA has not been used as an impact area for modern ordnance or as a live fire exercises area (USACE, 2003).
- The entire OTA, including the former Swan Falls PBR No. 4, was incorporated into the Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area in 1980 by Public Land Order 5777. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Idaho National Guard and the Department of Interior occurred in 1979 that allowed continued use of the OTA for training and maneuvers by the National Guard until 2015 (USACE, 2003).

Project History

- **Inventory Project Report (USACE, 2002).** A Defense Environmental Restoration Program (DERP) FUDS Draft Inventory Project Report (INPR) for the Swan Falls PBR No. 4 was completed in September 2002. The findings determined that the site had been formerly used by the DoD and was therefore eligible under the DERP program. A Risk Assessment Code (RAC) of 4 was assigned to the bombing range.
- **Archives Search Report (USACE, 2003).** USACE completed an ASR in September 2003 to assess the presence or absence of contamination from facility activities. The ASR included a visit to the site on April 22, 2003. The primary purpose of the site visit was to assess the presence of MEC through non-intrusive means. Interviews, historical research, and site reconnaissance determined:

The U.S. Army Air Corps used conventional ordnance at Swan Falls PBR No. 4

Ordnance and explosives used at the range included:

Sand-filled M38A2, 100-lb practice bombs,

Practice bomb spotting charges, and

Small arms ammunition (.50 caliber and smaller)

No evidence for the use of chemical warfare materials storage or use at the range exists.

A Risk Assessment Code (RAC) of 4 was assigned to the range complex.

- **INPR Supplement (USACE, 2004).** An INPR Supplement was completed in November 2004 identified the Swan Falls PBR No. 4 as a Range Complex No. 1 (1,405 acres) consisting of three sub-ranges: Bombing Range No. 1 (649 acres), Bombing Range No. 2 (649 acres), and Air-To-Ground Range (296 acres). The INPR Supplement assigned a RAC score of 4 to Range Complex No. 1, and confirmed use of M38A2 practice bombs, M1A1 spotting charges, and .50-caliber munitions on the range. No additional new information is provided in the document.